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Opinion

Big-ticket priorities

While public attention last week was focused on the \$299 million arena to be built on the riverfront in downtown Louisville – and Gov. Ernie Fletcher's promise of \$75 million in state money to help pay for it – a report on the University of Kentucky's College of Pharmacy got lost under the radar.

The College of Pharmacy routinely has been ranked the third best in the nation by *U.S. News & World Report* magazine for some years. This year, it fell to No. 8 in the nation.

The reason is the college building, part of the UK Medical Center complex, is too small and lacks adequate space for the 131 students enrolled.

A new \$120 million College of Pharmacy building is the number-one budget priority by the state Council on Postsecondary Education between 2006 and 2012 among university capital construction projects serving research and economic development.

So far, the General Assembly has seen fit to earmark only \$40 million for the new pharmacy building.

And with arena commitments and other priorities, the 2006 General Assembly isn't likely to come up with the \$80 million needed to pay for a new pharmacy building.

Of course, 23,000 people won't cram into the College of Pharmacy building to watch students learn to fill prescriptions. Businesses won't pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for luxury boxes overlooking pharmacy lecture halls.

But a professional school with such a high national reputation that it accepts only 13 percent of all applications, most of which are from out of state, is languishing in outdated facilities.

Has it been so long that everyone has forgotten the commitment to make the University of Kentucky among the top research universities in the nation? Have we become so focused on a fancy arena for the University of Louisville to play basketball in that we allow UK's one nationally-ranked college to languish and decline for lack of money?

Sadly, the answer to both is yes.